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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

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~ Debate Over ID Theft! ~ People Are Talking! ~ More Trojans Erupt!
~ Cyber Cons Not Vandals ~ Google Tests Copyright ~ Paypal Hit By Snafu!

~ New AOL Antispyware! ~ New Worm Spoofs Google ~ Jeeves Gets Fired!
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-* Atari Brings Back Bygone Era *-
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it's official, summer is gone. It certainly doesn't feel like it, thankfully. It's hard to believe that another season has come and gone. And, I just got another year older. What's this world coming to?! Another massive hurricane is about to hit the gulf coast again, but hopefully not the eastern portion. How these people could possibly go through more disaster is beyond me.

Well, I don't have much to say this week, so let's move on to more less serious topics.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

[Editor's note: Being "under the weather" seems to be taking hold across the country lately. Our People Are Talking" column will resume next week as Joe recovers from an illness.]

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Metal Gear Solid 3!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Dragon Quest VIII!
Wild Arms 4!
And much more!

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Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence is the enhanced edition of the smash-hit action game Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, including all-new game modes such as the long-awaited addition of online gameplay, new duel mode, different camera perspectives, a demo theater mode and the original Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake games. Subsistence will draw gamers deeper into the world of Metal Gear Solid 3, with its immersive new content and action-packed gameplay.

For the first time in the history of the Metal Gear franchise, the game now provides an online gameplay environment. In the new "Online Mode", gamers can choose their mission and rules, including "Team Battle" and "Snake and Enemy" (one person becomes Snake and the other person blocks out his mission), and then fight it out online. This new mode also brings the classic Metal Gear Solid combat elements into online play, such as the "Close Quarters Combat (CQC)" proximity encounters, stealth and sniping.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence has also added the option of the "Third Person View Camera" for every stage of the game. This wider field of vision and complete freedom of movement brings an incredible sense of realism to the game. Gamers will have an easier time spotting enemies on-screen and preparing for their next stealth maneuver.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence also contains the original versions of Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake that were previously released only in Japan for the MSX2 game console. These titles, based on the concept of infiltrating the enemy base using stealth tactics, rather than eliminating all of your enemies, were an innovative take on the action genre, proposing an entirely new approach to gameplay. Metal Gear Solid 3 is set in the 1960’s, before the events of the MSX2 titles. Bringing Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake to the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system gives gamers more information about the storyline in what happens following the events of Metal Gear Solid 3.

New stages have also been added to the popular "Snake vs. Monkey" mode (staring Snake and the beloved Ape Escape monkeys). Players who complete the entire game will also unlock a variety of new modes, including "Duel Mode" (a mode that allows gamers to replay all boss battles), and "Demo Theater" (where gamers can alter Snake’s face paint and camouflage, and view movies starring their own unique Snake character).

Genji: Dawn of the Samurai Ships For Playstation 2

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced the release of Genji: Dawn of the Samurai, available exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system. Developed by Game Republic, Sony Computer Entertainment Japan, Genji: Dawn of the Samurai is an intense 3D

single-player samurai swordfighting action-adventure game set upon twelfth century feudal Japan. A dramatic samurai plot fused with mythology, Genji: Dawn of the Samurai delivers a story of two noble warriors engaged in a crusade against mythical forces controlling Japan.

Genji: Dawn of the Samurai features motion-captured swordplay choreographed by Japan’s leading swordsman, elegantly styled environments of feudal Japan and more than an hour of rich cinematics developed by industry pioneers to tell a dramatic story of revenge. Gamers will battle their way through 30 missions against mythical enemies and fantastical creatures using two characters possessing unique fighting styles, a robust advanced enhancement system consisting of an extensive weapon, armor, and upgrade system making Genji: Dawn of the Samurai an intense 3D action-adventure must-have title for PlayStation 2.

"Genji: Dawn of the Samurai blends the best of both literature and entertainment to create an epic and historic video game showcasing the dawn of the samurai," said Susan Nourai, director, online and product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "Through our work with motion-picture industry pioneers in cinematics, motion-capture and more, we’ve made great efforts to satisfy fans of the action-adventure and fighting genres. This immersive title will definitely blow away our PlayStation 2 fans due in large part to its enriching graphics and unique Japanese historic storyline."

This historic samurai tale is set against the beautiful and elegant environments of 1159 A.D. feudal Japan where the aristocratic period has come to an end and wealth and family lineage no longer control the land. Power now rules the country and the people. Genji: Dawn of the Samurai delivers a story of two noble warriors engaged in a crusade against mythical forces controlling Japan.

The Heishi, a brutal samurai clan armed with powerful mythical stones has struck fear into the citizens of Kyo with its tyrannical rule and mysterious power. As Yoshitune, a cunning swordsman and one of the few surviving descendants of the vanquished Genji clan, players embark on an epic adventure across the beautiful country of feudal Japan to rid it of the Heishi clan’s oppressive rule. With swords in hand and the aide of a powerful ally, players must wage war against skilled swordsmen, vicious demons and a world rife with evil. The dawn of the samurai has arrived.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has rated Genji: Dawn of the Samurai "M" for Mature.

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King Ships Soon For Playstation 2

Square Enix, Inc., the publisher of Square Enix interactive entertainment products in North America, announced that Dragon Quest VIII - Journey of the Cursed King (Dragon Qquest VIII) will ship to retailers November 22nd, exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system.

The first PlayStation2 title in the series, Dragon Quest VIII is the latest in the legendary franchise that has sold over 40 million units worldwide. Updates for the North American release include: voice-overs, a full-orchestral soundtrack, a completely renovated GUI menu system, new battle abilities, and improved animations. These new additions greatly

enhance the gaming experience for the North American audience. A bonus disc will also be included with a playable demo of the North American version of FINAL FANTASY XII.

The wait is finally over. Dragon Quest is back, now in glorious 3D! Representing the collaboration of some of Japan's finest creative talent, Dragon Quest VIII showcases the masterfully woven narrative of series' creator Yuji Horii, the distinctive character designs of legendary manga artist Akira Toriyama, and the grandly evocative orchestral soundtrack of renowned composer Koichi Sugiyama. Charged with the task of uniting their visions, highly respected developer Level-5, Inc. delivers a richly detailed environment, vast enough to house Yuji Horii's sweeping drama, and a cel-shaded graphics engine which perfectly captures the spirit of Akira Toriyama's character designs. The result is a living, breathing world straight from Japanese anime, where the shapes on the horizon aren't just scenery, but new places to explore!

A mysterious jester. A forbidden scepter. A fiendish curse. A once idyllic kingdom lies entangled in a web of enchanted vines, its king and princess hideously transformed, its castle and subjects frozen in time. Only one person has survived this horror unscathed: you!

Only you can save your king and country by lifting the shadow of the evil jester's curse ... But it won't be easy. An epic tale of friendship, bravery, and adventure awaits you on the grassy fields, snow-capped mountains, and restless seas of Dragon Quest VIII!

Dragon Quest VIII will be available at North American retailers for a suggested retail price of $49.99 (USD). Additional information and the official trailer can be found at http://www.dragonquest8.com. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has rated the title "T" for Teen.

Wild Arms 4 and Shadow Hearts: From The New World RPG's Coming To Playstation 2 In 2006

XSEED Games, a new video game publisher, today announced that it has obtained exclusive publishing rights for WILD ARMS(R) 4 and SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD (both for the PlayStation(R)2 computer entertainment system) for the North American market. Both titles are scheduled for release in Q1 2006.

"We are extremely excited to launch XSEED Games with these two quality role-playing games," said Jun Iwasaki, president, XSEED Games. "Our extensive past experience working with some of the highest quality titles in the industry has really honed our ability to spot the best in interactive entertainment. These two titles are the first of what the XSEED Games label will come to represent in bringing great entertainment to the U.S. audience. We expect both WILD ARMS 4 and SHADOW HEARTS to not only appeal to the existing fans of the series but also attract newcomers."

XSEED Games was founded in November 2004 by a small group of talented professionals, all of whom have extensive experience in the video game industry. Led by president Jun Iwasaki, the team launched several multi-million seller titles and many quality Japanese titles in multiple genres across the PlayStation(R), PlayStation 2 and PC platforms. More information on XSEED Games can be found at http://www.xseedgames.com.

Wild Arms 4

WILD ARMS 4 is the newest chapter in the popular role-playing game series which has shipped over 2.5 million copies worldwide. Featuring a new cast of characters, an original storyline, and a new strategic battle system, it appeals to new players of the series while fans will instantly recognize the mainstays of the WILD ARMS world of Filgaia. WILD ARMS 4 follows the journey of four teenagers as they reshape the future of Filgaia.

The Story

Jude Maverick has grown up in an isolated town called Ciel, which is completely enclosed in a large sphere floating thousands of feet above the surface of Filgaia. His sheltered world changes forever when he sees the sky "tear" and ships entering his homeland. Upon inspecting the camp site set up by the intruders, he sees something that he has never seen before; a girl. The girl’s name is Yulie and she is being held captive by the intruders after being captured by a "Drifter" for hire, Arnaud G. Vasquez. After the invading army attacks Ciel and brings the whole sphere crashing down, Jude, Yulie and Arnaud join forces to find out the army’s true intention behind Yulie’s abduction. With the help of another Drifter, Raquel, these four idealistic teenagers travel the war-torn land of Filgaia in search of truth, their own identities and their individual paths to adulthood.

Key Features

* Innovative new HEX battle system unlike anything seen before in turn-based RPGs; easily accessible while providing an amazing amount of speed, depth and strategy.
* Action elements on the field map such as double-jumps, using the new "Accelerator" ability to manipulate time, and equipping items to solve puzzles eliminates the boredom of walking around waiting for random battles.
* Inspiring coming-of-age storyline as Jude learns to cope with the harsh realities of the outside world with the help of his newfound friends.
* Events presented in a distinctive use of polygons and shading with voice-overs.

WILD ARMS 4 is scheduled for release in Q1 2006. The title was released in Japan on March 24, 2005 by Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. and developed by Media. Vision Entertainment Inc. Information on the title will be available at http://www.wildarms4.com.

Shadow Hearts: From The New World

The third and latest installment in the critically acclaimed role-playing game series, Shadow Hearts: From The New World takes place in the United States during the Great Depression. Featuring a gripping and inspirational storyline with up to 60 hours of gameplay, players can expect to run into a unique set of characters at famous, real-world locations including Chicago, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas and New York. The addictive Judgment Ring System has been improved, adding even more excitement and strategy to the overall gameplay.

The Story

The story begins as Johnny Garland, a young, 16-year old detective who lost his father, sister and his memory in an accident, accepts an investigation

to track down a criminal suspect who escaped from custody. As he closes in on the suspect, Johnny witnesses a supernatural occurrence - a huge monster appears from a green light known as the "window" and swallows up the criminal. Apparently, a series of horrific incidents similar to this have been plaguing the cities across the nation. Johnny's female counterpart is 21-year-old bounty hunter Shania, a Native American who is searching for these mysterious windows and determined to fight them using her spiritual powers. Together, they travel around the states and are joined by other characters.

Key Features

* Series trademark Judgment Ring battle system makes a return with improvements - "Stock System" allowing players the option of executing a "Combo" command with a second character or "Double" command enabling a character to perform two different actions in one turn.
* A completely new story and set of new characters will make the title easily accessible to newcomers of the series with its unique style and sense of humor.
* A cast of well-drawn, entertaining characters with distinct personalities and reappearances by a few of the series' favorites.
* Experience a higher level of realism with easy to navigate, visually-stunning backgrounds, special lighting and illumination effects.
* Huge production values with dramatic events unfolding through high quality graphics, CG cut scenes, impressive sound effects and voice-overs.

Shadow Hearts: From The New World is scheduled for release in Q1 2006. The title was released in Japan on July 28, 2005 by Aruze and developed by Nautilus. The ESRB rating and suggested retail price will be announced at a later date. Information on the title will be available at http://www.shadowheartsnewworld.com.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Atari Brings Back Bygone Era

Some sobering news for anyone who has recently crested 40: Everything you grew up with is now officially retro. Clothes, music, hair styles - even video games.

Long before "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," there was "Pong," a simple video game from Nolan Bushnell and the folks at the original Atari Inc. Two paddles, one ball and no Hot Coffee mod to unlock hidden sex scenes. THAT was gaming.

The Atari brand has traded hands in the years since "Pong" hit the scene, but the new owners are still milking some mileage out of this game and 39 others with Atari Flashback 2. This $30 device offers a fun and affordable glimpse into the gaming's past - one that, for better and worse, looks nothing like the present.

The console itself looks like a scaled-down version of an old Atari 2600, with faux wood paneling and other dated details. There are no cartridges to plug in, as technology advances have made it easy to stuff all of the games onto a small chip inside. And the controllers are exactly like the Atari 2600 joysticks of yore.

The unit connects to your home television through common audio and video RCA inputs. Many sets have these connections on the front, which is a bonus with this console because I found the cables that come with it a bit short.

Among the 40 titles are classics like "Centipede," "Asteroids," "Missile Command," "Yar's Revenge" and "Pitfall." Some are licensed from Activision Inc., which made games for the 2600, but most are original Atari gems.

How do these titles hold up in the face of today's video games with highly detailed graphics, Dolby Digital sound and online connectivity? As well as could be expected of large primary-colored blocks jumping around the screen.

But there is magic in the way those blocks moved. Hours of magic.

Games like "Missile Command" have the type of player interaction that remains viable in plot and movement. My mind was thrust back decades as I began to protect the cities closest to my ammunition bunker, keeping an eye peeled for smart bombs, those little blinking diamonds that fell from the sky and tried to evade my explosions.

And "Millipede," a sequel to the popular "Centipede" title, was a blast. I was racking up extra lives on only my second attempt as I weaved past that infernal spider that crept from the corners seeking to squash me.

The action games held up well, but adventure games like "Haunted House" and "Wizard" were mostly duds and offered little real suspense.

Seriously. How scary can a blinking green square be anyway?

The sounds produced by these games are rudimentary at best. Even my cell phone makes more intricate tones.

Nonetheless, lots of people simply refuse to let go of retro-gaming.

Consider that many who long for old quarter-gobbling arcade games like "Joust," "Defender" and "Crystal Castle" have gravitated to free software called MAME, short for Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator. MAME can run the original ROMs from hundreds of arcade game machines. And those ROMs are also readily available online.

The legality of using MAME to play ROMs you don't actually own is up for debate. But an enthusiastic online community is keeping the old titles alive, and there's no debating the lure of a pixelated pastime that helped define a generation.

Atari has done a nice job of legally giving us another look at these early games, long after the consoles themselves have been relegated to the dust bin.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Cyber Cons, Not Vandals, Now Behind Viruses

Computer hackers seeking financial gain rather than thrills or notoriety are increasingly flooding the Internet with malicious software code, according to a semi-annual report issued on Sunday.

Symantec Corp.’s Internet Security Threat Report said during the first half of 2005 the number of new viruses targeting Microsoft Windows users jumped 48 percent to nearly 11,000 compared to the previous six months as hackers used new tools and a growing sophistication to create malicious code.

The latest report by the world’s biggest security software maker also found that viruses exposing confidential information made up three-quarters of the top 50 viruses, worms and Trojans, up from 54 percent in the last six months of 2004.

It also said an increasing amount of menacing software allowed spam to be relayed automatically from computer to computer. These so-called "Trojan" programs can download and install adware to display pop-up ads in a user’s Web browser.

More so-called robot, or "bot" networks, which are created when a hacker illegally gains control of a large number of computers, are now available for sale or rent in the underworld of the Internet, Symantec said.

"As financial rewards increase, attackers will likely develop more sophisticated and stealthier malicious code that will attempt to disable antivirus, firewalls, and other security concerns," the report said.

Vincent Weafer, a security expert at Symantec, said early generations of cybervandals tended to unleash viruses as a way to bolster their reputations in the murky hacker world but now the motivation has turned to financial gain using more targeted malicious software.

The number of headline-grabbing viruses has slowed since the Blaster worm outbreak in 2003, which targeted Microsoft software and devastated hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide.

Instead, there is now a surge in people trying to gain control over a network of computers to launch attacks as well as a growing number of phishing scams that trick users into clicking onto a Web site that contains infected code, he said.

"We are seeing a very significant change where we are seeing far fewer large pandemics," Weafer said. "However we are seeing a large volume increase in cyberattacks, viruses and variants."

Indeed, Symantec saw an average of 10,532 active bot network computers per day, an increase of more than 140 percent over the prior six months.

It also said phishing messages grew to an average 5.70 million messages a day from 2.99 million.

"What we are saying is that attackers are increasingly targeting your assets and your private information," Weafer said.

New P2P Worm Spoofs Google

A computer worm that creates a bogus Google Web site and spreads via peer-to-peer networks continues to proliferate worldwide after being detected late last week by security specialist PandaLabs.

The P2Load.A worm, with both malware and adware functions, is transmitted via the P2P programs Shareaza and Imesh. It copies itself to the shared directory of these programs as an executable file called "Knights of the Old Republic II," in reference to a computer game based on the Star Wars universe.

When the file is executed, an error message is displayed, informing the user that there is a missing file and offering to download it. Once the file is downloaded, the worm modifies the user’s start page and hosts file to spoof the identity of Google, explained Forrest Clark, senior manager of consumer product marketing for PandaLabs.

The modified hosts file, which associates domain names and Internet Protocol addresses, redirects users to a replica of Google hosted on a server in Germany. Although search results generally are rendered as they would be with a normal Google search, the sponsored links are different.

Instead of links to the Web sites of Google’s paying customers, others appear that have been specified by the malware creator. The result is increased traffic and revenue for these Web sites, Clark said.

"With the ability to alter the hosts file and hijack a Web browser, this worm represents a higher level of sophistication of online attack, focusing on financial gain," Clark said. "It has the potential to lead someone to other sites by changing the content of the file downloaded, and to use other phishing techniques against other Web sites."

PandaLabs was able to shut down the Web page that hosted one of the files of the P2Load.A worm after contacting the page’s ISP. Today, Clark said that while the worm initially appeared in Chile and the U.S., it has spread throughout Europe and is considered a medium-grade threat.

"It’s becoming more difficult to segregate attacks that use multiple venues to do their damage," Clark said. "This is a serious issue because the worm could be used to redirect users to a popular banking or e-commerce site and send a message prompting them to reveal sensitive personal information."

Hacker Spams Huge Quantities Of Trojans, Again

For the second day in a row, an unknown attacker Tuesday spammed major quantities of a new Bagle-esque Trojan horse that turns off virtually every known security program and blocks access to security sites on the Internet.

Several variants of the BagleDI-U Trojan - dubbed Bagle.cd by McAfee, and Bagle.da by Trend Micro - have been spammed since Monday at approximately 11 a.m. EDT. A second wave hit the Internet around the same time Tuesday, said U.K.-based security firm Sophos.

"This is the second massive e-mail attack from this hacker in two days, the creator is obviously intent on infecting as many people as possible," said Carole Theriault, a senior security consultant at Sophos, in a statement.

The variants are easy to spot, since all come with a blank subject head with a message of "new price" and an attached file in .zip format that takes monikers such as "09_price.zip," "price_new.zip," and "price2.zip."

BagleDI-U (or whatever others call it), attempts to turn off a long list of security-related processes; deletes Windows Registry keys for software from Symantec, MacAfee, Kaspersky, Panda, Zone Labs, and Agnitum; blocks the browser from accessing Web sites; and downloads additional code from a wide range of malicious Web sites.

The Trojan (or worm; some vendors claim it’s the latter) also boasts an anti-Netsky feature that prevents worms in that family from executing on an infected PC.

Most security vendors have pegged BagleDI-U as a low- to medium-level threat.

New Mobile Virus Can Jump to PCs

Yet another virus targeting mobile devices has emerged, this time with a new twist: It has the potential to infect PCs when users transfer data from phone to computer.

The Cardtrap.A Trojan resembles other malware targeting handhelds running the Symbian operating system, such as Cabir, that typically spread through a phone’s built-in messaging applications or by way of Bluetooth wireless connections.

However, unlike earlier mobile-phone viruses, Cardtrap.A has a built-in mechanism that plants two worms on a phone’s memory card with the ultimate goal of infecting a PC.

In addition to planting Win32/Padobot.Z and Win32/Rays worms, the mobile virus also creates an autorun file on the memory card so that when the card is inserted into the Windows PC, it automatically installs and runs the malware.

In addition, the virus overwrites normal applications installed on the affected mobile device, preventing said applications from working properly.

The ultimate objective of the Trojan is most likely to cause the user to infect his or her PC with worms in the act of trying to disinfect the phone, said Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer at F-Secure.

A typical reaction of many users who discover the infection of Cardtrap.A would be to insert the phone memory card into the PC to copy the file manager or disinfection tool to the card. But this is precisely what would

create the PC infection.

"This is interesting because it is the first mobile virus that tries to infect a Windows machine using a virus it carries in addition to the mobile Trojan," Hypponen said.

Cardtrap.A presents a low risk to most mobile users, Hypponen explained, because it has not spread very far at this point. It apparently originated at a Web site that is distributing pirated games for mobile phones, Hypponen said. It can infect devices running the Symbian Series 60 OS, including products from Nokia, Panasonic, Sendo and Siemens.

While this virus might not have a massive impact on mobile-phone users around the world, malware practitioners clearly are taking a keener interest in mobile phones. But most analysts and security professionals contend that it will be a few years before mobile viruses will have much of an impact.

Still, Hyponnen said one mobile-phone provider, which he declined to identify, reported to F-Secure that it is receiving some 200 infected phones a day from customers. "The first mobile virus appeared about a year ago, and since Cabir emerged, the number of viruses has increased to about 80," he said.

Hyponnen suggested that Cardtrap.A could represent a new trend in mobile malware, with future variants written so that they can jump back and forth between handheld and PC through memory cards, USB connections or Bluetooth.

A vast majority of phones used today don’t have the power to receive viruses, noted Gregg Mastoras, senior security analyst at Sophos. "There are not that many smartphones out there, and there is no ubiquitous operating system for those devices, so the potential for a major outbreak is very low."

But, he added, given the millions of mobile phones in use, the devices are attractive targets and it might be only a matter of time before someone is able to create a virus that wreaks widespread havoc.

Mac Users Deluding Themselves Over Security

Mac users are operating under a false sense of security, according to Symantec, and Firefox users will have to recognize that the open-source browser is currently a greater security risk than Internet Explorer.

Symantec s latest Internet Security Threat Report, published Monday, found evidence that attackers are beginning to organize for attacks on the Mac operating system. Researchers also found that over the past six months, nearly twice as many vulnerabilities surfaced in Mozilla browsers as in Explorer.

It is now clear that the Mac OS is increasingly becoming a target for the malicious activity, contrary to popular belief that the Mac OS is immune to traditional security concerns, the report said.

Symantec said OS X - based on BSD Unix - now shares many of the security concerns affecting Unix users. As Mac OS X users demand more features and implement more ports of popular UNIX applications, vulnerabilities and

exploits targeting this operating system and its underlying code base are likely to increase, Symantec said in the report.

The number of security bugs confirmed by Apple has remained about the same over the past two six-month reporting periods, with no widespread exploits, Symantec said. But an analysis of a rootkit called Mac OS X/Weapox - based on the AdoreBSD rootkit - indicates the situation might not last much longer. While there have been no reports of widespread infection to date, this Trojan serves to demonstrate that as Mac OS X increases in popularity so too will the scrutiny it receives from potential attackers, the report said. Mac users may be operating under a false sense of security.

Twenty-five vulnerabilities were disclosed for Mozilla browsers, including Firefox, in the first half of the year, compared with 13 for Explorer, Symantec said. Eighteen of the Mozilla flaws were classified as high severity, compared with eight high-severity Explorer flaws.

Symantec warned of other emerging threats, notably to increasingly popular IP telephony systems, wireless networks and mobile devices. Meanwhile, attack code is becoming more sophisticated, with attackers deploying modular code that can avoid detection systems, Symantec said.

Credit Card Court Battle Tests Laws

Testing the bounds of consumer protection laws, Visa USA Inc. and MasterCard International Inc. are headed for court to determine whether they are obliged to notify 264,000 customers that a computer hacker stole their account information.

The dispute to be argued Friday in San Francisco County Superior Court revolves around a highly publicized security breakdown at CardSystems Solutions Inc., one of the nation’s largest payment processors.

Although a ruling in the class-action consumer lawsuit wouldn’t have legal standing outside the state, it would increase the pressure on Visa and MasterCard to notify all affected accountholders in this and any future breaches.

That would compound the headaches that the CardSystems imbroglio already has caused.

The breach, initially disclosed by MasterCard three months ago, exposed up to 40 million credit and debit card accounts to potential abuse between August 2004 and May 2005.

It’s the largest of more than 70 consumer information security breaches reported in the past seven months, according to the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse.

Although the scope of the CardSystems break-in has been generally outlined, the credit card associations haven’t sent warnings to the most vulnerable customers.

San Francisco-based Visa and Purchase, N.Y.-based MasterCard maintain that responsibility should fall to the myriad banks that administer the accounts because neither credit card association has direct relationships with the affected customers.

Both Visa and MasterCard provide processing and marketing services to thousands of banks nationwide. It’s a profitable endeavor. MasterCard’s parent company earned $213.5 million on revenue of $1.4 billion during the first half of this year, according to documents filed in preparation for an initial public offering of stock. Visa doesn’t disclose its profit.

Internal investigations have determined that the still-unknown thief grabbed enough sensitive details from CardSystems to defraud about 264,000 Visa and MasterCard accountholders nationwide, according to evidence gathered in the lawsuit, which was filed by San Rafael, Calif., attorney Ira Rothken.

No home addresses or Social Security numbers were stolen in the CardSystems breach, minimizing the risk for identity theft. But the hacking obtained customer names, account numbers and security codes that could be used to create bogus credit and debit cards.

The lawsuit seeks a court order requiring Visa and MasterCard to warn each Californian whose information was compromised. The order is being sought under a pioneering state law that requires consumers to be alerted whenever personal information stored on computers is lost, stolen or breached.

Since California imposed the mandate in July 2003, 35 other states have approved or proposed similar laws, according to the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. That means other states could end up addressing similar legal issues raised by this California case.

"We are trying to establish an efficient method that would hold Visa and MasterCard responsible for giving all consumers their due notices, so each customer can decide whether they want to change their card number," Rothken said.

Replacing a credit card costs an issuer about $35.

That would total $9.24 million for 264,000 cards that might have to be replaced if customers learn of the fraud risk, with the cost rising even higher to the industry if it’s discovered even more of the 40 million accounts are vulnerable.

Both Visa and MasterCard have blamed CardSystems’ lax security for the breach. Infuriated by the breakdown, Visa has since cut its ties with Atlanta-based CardSystems, which says it has tightened controls to comply with industry standards.

In their legal briefs, Visa and MasterCard have argued there’s little chance any affected customer will lose a cent because of the association’s long-standing policies to reverse all charges for fraudulent transactions. The "zero liability" policy lessens the need to alert individual customers about the fraud risks, said MasterCard spokeswoman Sharon Gamsin.

In a statement, Visa also said it is comfortable with its anti-fraud measures. But both companies worry that the opposite message might be sent if they are ordered to warn individual customers.

"Such an order would harm the banks’ goodwill because some customers would certainly be confused by the notice and believe the issuing banks were somehow to blame for the security breach," Visa’s attorneys argued in a court brief.

The companies' fraud-fighting assurances don't soothe Eric Parke, a Marin County resident representing consumer interests in the suit. In a sworn declaration, Parke said he has been fretting about his potential fraud exposure since news of the CardSystems theft broke.

"I do not think it's fair for ... me to have to look through cryptic credit card statements with (an) eye toward forensically determining if fraud was committed ... when Visa and MasterCard can just tell me if my data was compromised," said Parke, who has seven MasterCard and Visa accounts.

AOL Unveils New Antispyware Tools

America Online is rolling out a new suite of antispyware tools that it claims will be faster, more effective and less confusing for its members.

The new application, AOL Spyware Protection 2.0, was developed with technology from Computer Associates. In the past, AOL had used technology provided by Aluria Software. Although Aluria was acquired by rival firm Earthlink, AOL insists that it went with Computer Associates prior to the takeover.

"Computer Associates simply has a bigger database, and its technology is faster and has more scanning ability," said AOL spokesperson Andrew Weinstein. "We felt this was the best antispyware that we could offer our members."

According to the company, the new antispyware tools scan for more than 28,000 known types of adware, keyloggers, spyware and Trojan horses. The number of scans can be done as frequently as every minute.

The scanning engine is based on CA's eTrust PestPatrol product. Users who have AOL 9.0 will have the program download automatically. Those using other versions of AOL's software can manually download it.

One significant change in AOL's spyware tools comes with how blocked or discovered applications are reported to users. In the previous version of the software, spyware was ranked according to threat level, with terms like "elevated" describing the spyware's potential threat to user security.

But AOL heard from its members that such terms were confusing and that they often were unsure about whether to delete a program or keep it.

In response, AOL revamped its spyware-ranking system so there are only two definitions: "security risk" and "nuisance." Users now are given the option of deleting the spyware after being informed about whether a program presents a threat or is simply deemed irritating because it causes pop-ups or something that won't actually do users harm.

"Users don't want to spend time trying to figure out if something is a security risk," said Weinstein. "This way, they can see that it is, delete it and move on."

PayPal Hit By Tech Snafu

PayPal, the online payment service owned by online auctioneer EBay Inc., on Wednesday confirmed that charges were showing up twice on some customers' bills, causing confusion.

The problem stems from a technical snafu with a third-party transaction processor, which a PayPal spokeswoman declined to name. As of Wednesday, the companies were still trying to fix the problem, which started early in the month.

Some customers using PayPal debit cards on Sept. 8 or Sept. 9 to make offline purchases had the transactions listed on their online bill Sept. 15 and then again on Sept. 18. The earlier transaction said "completed," while the other "pending." No one has actually been charged twice, PayPal spokeswoman Amanda Pires said.

Nevertheless, some customers have been irate at seeing the duplicate line item.

"That's very confusing to people," Pires said. "We apologize, and we know we have to fix it."

The problem was technical and only with the third-party processor, Pires said. She couldn't say when the companies would finish reversing all of the duplicate transactions.

The problem was confined to the United States and affected only a "small percentage" of customers, Pires said. PayPal has 79 million customers worldwide.

Many people who make a living selling on EBay use PayPal debit cards to draw off the money received from buyers. Merchants who have sites outside of EBay, but use PayPal as a payment method also use the cards. The snafu affected only debit card users.

Jeeves Gets Fired

The search engine Ask Jeeves's dapper, grinning butler will soon be out of a job.

Jeeves's pink slip came from IAC/InterActiveCorp chair and chief executive officer Barry Diller, who announced the change during a Goldman Sachs Group investor conference in New York. IAC/InterActiveCorp completed its purchase of Ask Jeeves in July.

"By the way, Jeeves will disappear, and we will be called Ask or Ask.com," Diller said during the conference. "Not that I don't like that butler. He's actually a thinner butler now."

Jeeves, created by British humorist P.G. Wodehouse, was slimmed down and given a tan last year, said Lisa Meakin, a London-based spokesperson for Ask Jeeves. But surveys revealed that users tended to pigeonhole the search engine as "old-fashioned" and appropriate for only question-based queries, Meakin said.

The company's research has shown that use of the Jeeves character as the prominent symbol of the brand blinds people to recent changes and improvements in the search engine, the company said in a statement.

No timeline has been given for Jeeves’s departure, and no final decision on a new name for the search engine has been made, Meakin said.

Google to Put Copyright Laws to the Test

Copyright laws written long before the digital age are about to be tested as Google Inc. attempts to scan millions of books and make their text fully searchable on the Internet.

Tony Sanfilippo is of two minds when it comes to Google’s ambitious program. On the one hand, Sanfilippo credits the program for boosting sales of obscure titles at Penn State University Press, where he works. On the other, he’s worried that Google’s plans to create digital copies of books obtained directly from libraries could hurt his industry’s long-term revenues.

With Google’s book-scanning program set to resume in earnest this fall, copyright laws that long preceded the Internet look to be headed for a digital-age test.

The outcome could determine how easy it will be for people with Internet access to benefit from knowledge that’s now mostly locked up - in books sitting on dusty library shelves, many of them out of print.

"More and more people are expecting access, and they are making do with what they can get easy access to," said Brewster Kahle, co-founder of the Internet Archive, which runs smaller book-scanning projects, mostly for out-of-copyright works. "Let’s make it so that they find great works rather than whatever just happens to be on the Net."

To prevent the wholesale file-sharing that is plaguing the entertainment industry, Google has set some limits in its library project: Users won’t be able to easily print materials or read more than small portions of copyright works online.

Google also says it will send readers hungry for more directly to booksellers and libraries.

But many publishers’ remain wary.

To endorse Google’s library initiative is to say "it’s OK to break into my house because you’re going to clean my kitchen," said Sally Morris, chief executive of the U.K.-based Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers. "Just because you do something that’s not harmful or (is) beneficial doesn’t make it legal."

Morris and other publishers believe Google must get their permission first, as it has under the Print Publisher Program it launched in October 2004, two months before announcing the library initiative.

Under the publishers’ program, Google has deals with most major U.S. and U.K. publishers. It scans titles they submit, displays digital images of selected pages triggered by search queries and gives publishers a cut of revenues from accompanying ad displays.

But publishers aren’t submitting all their titles under that program, and

many of the titles Google wants to scan are out of print and belong to no publisher at all.

Jim Gerber, Google’s director of content partnerships, says the company would get no more than 15 percent of all books ever published if it relied solely on publisher submissions.

That’s why it has turned to libraries.

Under the Print Library Project, Google is scanning millions of copyright books from libraries at Harvard, Michigan and Stanford along with out-of-copyright materials there and at two other libraries.

Google has unilaterally set this rule: Publishers can tell it which books not to scan at all, similar to how Web site owners can request to be left out of search engine indexes. In August, the company halted the scanning of copyright books until Nov. 1, saying it wanted to give publishers time to compile their lists.

Richard Hull, executive director of the Text and Academic Authors Association, called Google’s approach backwards. Publishers shouldn’t have to bear the burden of record-keeping, agreed Sanfilippo, the Penn State press’s marketing and sales director.

"We’re not aware of everything we’ve published," Sanfilippo said. "Back in the 50s, 60s and 70s, there were no electronic files for those books."

Google, which wouldn’t say how many books it has scanned so far, says it believes its initiative is protected under the "fair use" provisions of copyright law.

Gerber argues that the initiative will "stimulate more people to contribute to the arts and the sciences by making these books more findable."

Washington lawyer Jonathan Band says Google’s case is strong given the limits on display - a few sentences at a time for works scanned from libraries, with technology making it difficult to recreate even a single page.

"I don’t see how making a few snippets of a work available to a user could have any negative impact on the market," said Band, who has advised library groups and Internet companies on copyright issues.

Under Google’s strictures, readers can see just five pages at a time of publisher-submitted titles - and no more than 20 percent of an entire book through multiple searches. For books in the public domain, they can read the entire book online.

Not all publishers are opposed.

"For a typical author, obscurity is a far greater threat than piracy," said Tim O’Reilly, chief executive of O’Reilly Media and an adviser to Google’s project. "Google is offering publishers an amazing opportunity for people to discover their content."

James Hilton, associate provost and interim librarian at the University of Michigan, said his school is contributing 7 million volumes over six years because one day, materials that aren’t searchable online simply won’t get read.

"That doesn’t mean it’s going to be read online, but it’s not going to be found if it’s not online," he said.

Hal Hallstein, a 2003 Colby College graduate, said Google’s project would have been useful for his studies in Buddhism. He typed the word "shunyata" - Sanskrit for emptiness - and found several books he didn’t know existed.

"The card catalog in my experience is rather limited in terms of the amount it really describes," he said.

Nonetheless, as e-media coordinator at Wisdom Publications, he believes each publisher should be able to decide whether to join, as his company has.

Much of the objections appear to stem from fears of setting a precedent that could do future harm to publishing.

"If Google is seen as being permitted to do this without any response, then probably others will do it," said Allan Adler, a vice president at the Association of American Publishers. "You would have a proliferation of databases of complete copies of these copyrighted works."

Publishers won’t rule out a lawsuit against Google.

The technology juggernaut, whose name is synonymous with online search, isn’t just shaking up book publishing.

Google has a separate project to archive television programs but has so far received limited permissions. The company also faces lawsuits over facilitating access to news resources and porn images online.

Jonathan Zittrain, an Internet legal scholar affiliated with Oxford and Harvard universities, says the book-scanning dispute comes down balancing commercial and social benefits.

"From the point of view of the publishers, you can’t blame them for playing their role, which is to maximize sales," he said. "But if fair use wasn’t found, (Google) would never be able to do the mass importation of books required to make a database that is socially useful."

Microsoft Could Face Fresh EU Case in Future

The European Commission may bring a new competition case against Microsoft after the EU executive received fresh complaints about the U.S. software giant, the EU competition commissioner said in a newspaper interview on Tuesday.

Neelie Kroes told the International Herald Tribune she would not wait for the outcome of an appeal by Microsoft before considering more action against the U.S. firm.

"We have had informal complaints, and we are using our time now to look at them. We’re not going to wait and do nothing," Kroes told the newspaper.

A Commission spokesman, however, denied that Brussels had any plans at the moment to file another suit against Microsoft, although he admitted new complaints had been lodged which the Commission was examining before taking

any decisions.

Microsoft was ordered last year to change the way it sells its software in Europe, and the company has appealed against the decision.

Kroes said the new, informal complaints were similar to the previous ones and focused on the bundling of existing and future applications.

The newspaper quoted a lawyer as saying the latest complaints centered on Microsoft’s Office suite of software applications, including Microsoft Word and Outlook, the e-mail program.

Jonathan Todd, spokesman for Kroes, said there were no plans currently for a new case against Microsoft.

"The European Commission is not intending at the moment to open a new case against Microsoft. The Commission is, however, determined to ensure the proper application of the March 2004 decision and in particular the remedies imposed by that decision," Todd told Reuters.

Todd declined to reveal the content of the complaints.

"We are currently in the throes of analyzing these informal complaints and the decision as to whether or not we will open up new case against Microsoft will only be taken once we have completed our scrutiny, our examination of the information we have received," he later told a news conference.

Earlier this month Microsoft filed a new lawsuit against the European Commission, the latest move in its long-running battle against antitrust sanctions imposed by the Commission for abuse of its dominant Windows software.

In March 2004, the Commission found Microsoft abused dominance of the Windows operating system so it could damage rival makers of work-group servers and media players.

Microsoft paid a 497-million-euro fine and issued remedies on the two issues, but nearly one and a half years later those sanctions have yet to bite.

EU Insists It Won’t Regulate the Internet

The European Union head office insisted Thursday that it had no plans to regulate the Internet as it launches new broadcasting rules later this year.

"I have no intention to ’regulate the Internet,’" EU Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding told a broadcasting conference in Liverpool, England. However, she said the European Commission had the duty to protect shared European values.

"Who in this room is in favor of child pornography on the new media? Who stands for the freedom to spread incitement to racial hatred on the new media?"

She said there was a broad consensus that child protection and hate speech

rules should also apply to "nonlinear" services, such as pay-TV or Internet broadcasts.

Internet firms and some broadcasters have firmly voiced their opposition to an EU-wide law over content.

British Broadcasting Corporation director general Mark Thompson said Wednesday that regulators needed to be realistic about how practical and desirable it was to enforce content in an on-demand, online world.

"Our own research suggests that public expectations of BBC online content are very different from their expectation of what they see on BBC Television - they simply do not feel they need, or want, the same level of protection."

He said self regulation grounded in continuous research into public attitudes was a better option for new media.

In a paper published on the Commission’s Web site ahead of the conference, AOL Europe Services said it believed the Internet industry has already responded to customer demand by creating common standards.

"As AOL has demonstrated over a number of years, it is in our commercial interests to be a responsible self-regulating service provider," it said.

Yahoo! Europe said the online environment was no Wild West as companies have worked together with national governments to tackle problems such as child porn.

In a letter to the Commission, it also warned that new media was evolving so quickly that the audiovisual world in 10 or 15 year’s time will not have any resemblance to today’s limited environment.

"Already, Internet users have access to a host of filtering, parental control and other tools enabling them to decide what is appropriate viewing for them and their families. It is not unreasonable to expect similar market-driven solutions to be provided for Internet Protocol TV," it said.

Opera Browser Abandons Advertising

Opera Software announced that users of the free PC version of its Web browser, Opera, will no longer have to view advertising banners in exchange for getting the browser without a licensing fee.

The company noted that the browser’s growth has made it possible to go free. Opera Software does still charge for its premium support services, though, which costs $35 per year. Also a source of revenue for the company are versions of the browser for mobile phones and other non-PC platforms.

"Today we invite the entire Internet community to use Opera and experience Web browsing as it should be," said Jon S. von Tetzchner, Opera’s chief executive. "Removing the ad banner and licensing fee will encourage many new users to discover the speed, security and unmatched usability of the Opera browser."

Opera currently commands a very small slice of the browser market, but the company is optimistic that this shift toward an advertising-free, non-fee

model will make it more popular.

"We think the market is ready for another competitor to Internet Explorer," said Tor Odland, Opera spokesperson.

"Firefox has demonstrated that an alternative browser can succeed, and we're looking forward to seeing greater adoption through this strategy shift," he added.

Although the inclusion of advertising might have given Opera somewhat of a boost to get the company where it is today, it is likely the browser maker no longer needs that type of help, considering its growth on other platforms.

"We're the leading browser vendor on the mobile side of things," said Odland, who pointed out that the browser can be seen on Nokia, Motorola and several Chinese and Japanese
phones.

Because of Opera's small size, many mobile-device companies have found it to be an ideal browser for their PDAs and mobile phones. Odland anticipates that Opera will establish an even firmer foothold in those areas in the future.

"We may have a small share when it comes to PCs," he said. "But many people see us as the leading mobile browser."

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